

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF TASK FORCE "Y", COMBAT COMMAND A,
(3D ARMORED DIVISION) AT VILLIERS FOSSARD, FRANCE
29 - 30 JUNE 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental S-3)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY-TANK ATTACK
IN HEDGEROW TERRAIN

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Task Force "Y", Combat Command A, 3d Armored Division, in the attack to reduce the Villiers Fossard Salient, 29-30 June 1944.

The 3d Armored Division landed in France as soon as the Omaha Beachhead had been expanded to the extent that there was sufficient space to provide bivouacs for its troops and vehicles.

The regiments and separate battalions of the division went into assembly areas in the vicinity of Isigny ^(Map B) immediately after landing. Headquarters 36th Armored Infantry Regiment and 2d Battalion, 36th Armored Infantry landed on 18 June 1944. Although the landings of all units of the Division were not completed until 4 July 1944, as each unit landed it became a part of XIX Corps Reserve. Thus, immediate readiness for combat was demanded, although it was not anticipated that the Division would be ordered into action until all units had landed and it could be used in a division role. (1) (Map A)

The period 20 - 28 June was the time in which the bridgehead was expanded to the northwest, culminating in the capture of Cherbourg. On the east, the British continued their attack on Caen. Since the Allied efforts

(1) A-1, p. 61-65.

were concentrated in these two actions, there was comparatively little activity immediately north of St. Lo. The German defenders had been successful in holding an irregular line north of Villiers Fossard so that a salient protruded into the sector of the 29th Infantry Division. (2)

In fulfilling the mission of a reserve unit, it was necessary to perfect various plans for possible employment, chiefly as that of the striking force in counterattack should the Germans launch an attack. However, there were plans for employment in limited objective attacks in the sector of the 29th Infantry Division.

In the preparation of plans to meet the situations that might arise, the Regimental Commander of the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment, the Battalion Commanders, and Regimental Staff Officers utilized to the utmost the opportunity for reconnaissance and informal conferences with leaders of the veteran divisions, 2d Infantry and 29th Infantry, in the area. Successful operations were studied and discussed with the hope that the 3d might profit from the experiences and mistakes of those who had been initiated in battle. (3)

THE TERRAIN

To those who had been indoctrinated with the principles of the use of Armor, it was a disheartening thought to envisage the employment of an armored division in the hedgerows of the Bocage Country of Normandy. Too many

(2) A-2, p. 63-65, 72; (3) Personal knowledge.

hulls of knocked out tanks of the separate tank battalions stood as evidence of the effectiveness of the German "88" and German bazooka.

Ernie Pyle, Hal Boyle, and other writers have written a great deal of the hedgerows and the Normandy terrain. A glance at the map or aerial photograph told the story immediately; that the terrain over which units of the Division might be employed was "hedgerow country" at its worst.

The terrain was divided into small compartments by the numerous hedgerows which ran in a very irregular pattern. Some were perfectly straight and laid the field off into little rectangles, others ran at angles to form varied geometric designs. There were triangles, parallelograms, trapezoids, and those with curving perimeters.

This type of terrain gave great advantage to the defender. With the summer foliage on the trees and bushes and the high grass growing on the hedgerows, visibility was limited in a great number of cases to the field immediately beyond the observer. High ground did not have the key importance it would normally merit. However, it was still of great importance in that an observer on high ground could have a commanding view of the road network.

Besides limiting observation, the hedgerows themselves were a barrier to movement of vehicles and personnel. Some were not as thick or as high as others, but almost all of them were sufficiently large to cause difficulty in movement. They were from six to ten feet thick at the base and

from four to eight feet in height. Out of the earth of the rows, bushes and trees grew. Some of the trees were full grown, ten to twelve inches in diameter or larger. The sod had been packed down year after year and the stumps of old trees, roots of trees, and other growth had made them have a solid composition which made them difficult to tear down.

With a minimum of work, the enemy could use these barriers to gain the best type of cover and concealment. A hole dug out of the bank made a shelter from practically all types of fire. A slit cut through the bank made a firing aperture which afforded protection for the firer. A little digging provided a protected platform for a machine gun, and mortars could be emplaced so that the crews and weapons were rendered less vulnerable to artillery or small arms fire. Telephone wire could be laid to provide a complete communication net work.

The terrain, in the words of General Doyle O. Hickey, was "An inverted trench system". The enemy did not have to construct trenches since the protection was already there. Sunken roads afforded covered routes of supply and evacuation, aiding materially in solving these problems for the defender. (4)

The tactics used by the divisions who had already faced the enemy in this type terrain seemed to be the only answer. This method was to take the fields one by one, getting the enemy out of his holes, inflicting as

(4) A-10, p. 302-304; A-2, p. 75.

many casualties as possible, and driving him back to the next hedgerow. The weakness in this method was that there was always another line of hedgerows to which the enemy could fall back. The maps showed that the Bocage country extended below St. Lo, thus a limited objective attack would begin and end in the hedgerows.

Since hedgerows of Normandy are all so much alike, excellent training in Tank-Infantry team attacks was possible in rear areas. Commanders took advantage of this period for this type special training and for final preparations. Various schemes had been worked out by the separate tank battalions and the infantry divisions with whom they worked. These methods of employment of small units in attack were studied and a model plan was selected. This method will be described later.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

(Sketches)

Attention focused on the salient in the sector of the 29th Infantry Division, north of St. Lo. The Regimental S-3 Section constructed a sand table of the area with a plan for the employment of TFY, the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment's task force of Combat Command A, should CCA be ordered to execute its attack plan in this sector. This sand table reemphasized more clearly than map study the obvious importance of Martinville Ridge which formed a part of the high ground northeast of St. Lo. This dominating terrain caused no little concern to the Commander who expected to be ordered to attack with this

at dusk and dug in for the night. The following day both the 1st and 3d Battalions were ordered to withdraw to their original positions. The salient remained." (5)

On 26 June 1944, CCA, 3d Armored Division, was ordered to move to the vicinity of St. Clair sur l'Elle with the mission of "Assisting the 29th Infantry Division in repelling any enemy attack which might be made in that sector, driving the enemy south or southeast of St. Lo."

On the following day the order for the attack by CCA on 29 June to reduce the salient came as no surprise, but the order shifted the zone to the west so that the Combat Command and TFY had to discard prior plans and make new ones.

TASK FORCE "Y" SITUATION AND ORDERS

Colonel Parks assembled his commanders and issued a warning order. This order will be discussed in detail later. On 28 June further reconnaissance was made by commanders and staff officers. The Line of Departure was verified on the ground and coordination with the units of the 29th Division was made. Forward assembly areas for companies of the task force were selected and routes forward to the line of departure were reconnoitered. Location of the TF CP and Aid Station were also selected. Communications were given a final check to be sure that all radios were netted properly and had the necessary channels.

(5) A-2, p. 87.

ridge out of his zone and on his left flank. The only consolation lay in the fact that the observation afforded by the ridge would be limited to the road net as the hedge-rows blocked practically all distant observation. (Map B)

The 29th Infantry Division attacked to reduce the salient. It is no reflection on that fine division to state that in its depleted and exhausted condition the attack failed. Concerning the attack by the 115th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division, on 21 June, the 29th Division History states, "In an attempt to reduce the German salient at Villiers-Fossard, the 115th was ordered to attack on June 21. Its 3d and 1st Battalions were on the west and east sides of the road, respectively. The 1st, however, was some two hundred yards in advance of the 3d in the vicinity of La Fossardiere and the Bois de Bretel, and actually on the salient's shoulder."

*gives some
more detail
in a few words*

"The 3d Battalion, supported by seven tanks, attacked at 0500 in a chill rain that softened the fields and hampered the movement of armor. K and L Companies were forward with I Company in reserve. Two tanks were knocked out in short order by the fire of 88 mm guns and German bazookas, and as a consequence the forward movement of the armor never developed. The foot troops went on alone, receiving machine gun fire from positions near the hamlet of Segueville. German mortars then registered on the attackers' stalled line."

"At 1630 the 1st Battalion attacked against strong resistance, recorded a minor gain, repelled a counterattack

THE ENEMY SITUATION

All available information concerning the enemy was collected and disseminated. CCA S-2 reported that the enemy salient was held by three companies of the 353d Fusilier Battalion with a platoon of mortars supporting each company. The flanks were held by two battalions of the 943d Infantry Regiment, one battalion on each flank. Enemy artillery was estimated to consist of four batteries, three light and one medium, in support of the position with an undetermined number of 170 mm howitzers south of St. Lo. The 2d S.S. (Das Reich) Division had been reported in the St. Lo area. (Maps B and C)

*no signal
anyway*

Weather conditions had prevented aerial reconnaissance so that there were no recent aerial photographs of the area. German counter intelligence had prevented the 29th Infantry Division from being able to spot exact locations of troops and weapons. From the 29th Division it was learned that the enemy had adopted an attitude of "laissez faire". If, however, a patrol went out it immediately ran into opposition. The Germans had their "88"'s sighted to cover all the roads, and panzerfausts emplaced in the corners of the hedgerows for employment against tanks. The Germans used mortar fire with deadly accuracy. They apparently had numerous OP's from which mortar fire could be directed. Machine guns were generally in the corners, with riflemen along the hedgerows.

A liaison officer was left at the 3d Battalion, 115th Infantry CP to keep in touch with the situation and to transmit information of any new developments.

ORDERS

FO No. 3 of XIX Corps, dated 272030 June, ordered an attack at 290900 by one Combat Command of the 3rd Armored Division to reduce Villiers Fossard salient. The 29th Infantry Division was ordered to occupy and defend the ground seized by the 3rd Armored Division, which would then return to its assembly area.

Artillery Annex to FO #3 prescribed the following timetable for air bombardment and supporting fires:

H-34 to H-20 Air Bombardment

H-20 to H-15 Artillery Fire

H-15 to H-10 Infantry rifle and heavy weapons fire

H-10 to H-hour Artillery fire

The Artillery plan called for the artillery of both the 29th Division and the 3rd Armored Division to support the attack, firing between the frontline and the objective. Corps artillery was instructed to fire counterbattery and selected targets behind the corps objective. (6)

FO #1 of 3rd Armored Division, dated 272300 June ordered Combat Command A to attack at 290900 June to secure the division objective, the high ground immediately south and southeast of Villiers Fossard.

The Composition of Combat Command A was prescribed as follows:

Hq & Hq Det. Combat Command A - Brig. Gen. Doyle O. Hickey, Commanding

32nd Armored Regiment

(6) A-7, p. 1-3.

36th Armored Infantry Regiment

803d Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached from XIX Corps
Co. A and Co. C, 23rd Armored Engineer Battalion, reinforced.

Co. A, 45th Armored Medical Battalion, reinforced

Co. A, Maintenance Battalion, 3rd Armored Division

FO #1 of Combat Command "A" dated 280800 ordered the attack at 290900 June to secure the high ground south and southeast of Villiers Fossard. Task Forces X, Y, and Z were designated as follows: (7) (Map B and C)

<u>Task Force X</u>	<u>Task Force Y</u>	<u>Task Force Z</u> (Reserve)
Col. Truman E. Boudinot, Commanding	Col. Graeme G. Parks, Commanding	Lt. Col. Walter Abney, Commanding
3d Bn, 32d Armd Regt	2d Bn, 32d Armd Regt	1st Bn, 32d Armd Regt
3d Bn, 36th Armd Inf Regt	2d Bn, 36th Armd Inf Regt	1st Bn, 36th Armd Inf Regt
Co. A, 803d TD Bn	Co. B, 803d TD Bn	803d TD Bn (- 2 Cos)
Co. C, 23d Armd Engr Bn. (- 1 Sqd)	Co. A, 23d Armd Engr Bn (- 1 Sqd)	2 squads, 23d Armd Engr Bn
5 tank dozers	5 tank dozers	1 angle dozer

Boundaries for Task Force X and Y were designated and the line held by the 29th Infantry Division was to be the Line of Departure. 67th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was placed in direct support of TFY.

The order included the fire plan as prescribed in FO #3 of XIX Corps. (8)

Task Force Y was broken down by Col. Parks into assault groups as follows:

(7) (8) A-7, p. 1-3.

Whitlaw Assault Group

Lt. Col. Nathaniel Whitlaw, Comdg.

Co. D, 36th Armd Inf Regt

Co. E, 32d Armd Regt

Plt. Co. B, 803d T.D. Bn.

Plt. Co. A, 23d Armd Engr Bn

2 tank dozers

Cockefair Assault Group

Lt. Col. Vincent E. Cockefair, Comdg.

Co. E, 36th Armd Inf Regt

Co. F, 32d Armd Regt

Plt. Co. B, 803d T.D. Bn.

Plt. Co. A, 23d Armd Engr Bn.

3 tank dozers

TFY TROOPS

Co. A, 45th Med Bn, Reinf

Co. A, Maintenance Bn.

RESERVE ASSAULT GROUP

Capt. James V. Nixon,
Comdg.

Co. F, 36th Armd Inf Regt

Co. B, 32d Armd Regt

Co. B, 703d TD Bn (- 2
plts)

Co. A, 23d Armd Engr Bn.
(- 2 plts and 1 sqd.)

The line of departure and boundaries were as shown on Map B. ^u The Line held by the 29th Division was the Line of Departure and the boundary ran east of the road which divided the zone. (9)

THE ATTACK OF TFY

At midnight TFY moved out, the tanks and infantry completed "marrying" by cutting in the proper vehicles in the column at the right place as the Infantry passed the tank units. The movement to the forward assembly areas ^{where} was without incident and all tank-infantry teams were in position at 290200 June. (10)

(9) A-7, A-9; (10) A-9.

The TF CP was composed of the Half track of the S-3, the 1/4 ton truck of the Regimental Commander, and several vehicles of the Regimental I&R Platoon. It was considered best to keep the CP group to a minimum as no great problem of supply or personnel was expected. The 3d Armored Division reconnaissance net, in which the S-2 radio was netted, was not operating so S-2 was left at the rear CP. It was estimated that the Combat Command would take its objective during the day and be relieved by the 29th Division after dark. (11)

At daybreak on the morning of 29 June it was cloudy with a light rain falling. The first thought provoked by this condition was that the air bombardment as scheduled in the fire plan would not be possible.

In order to be able to see the jumpoff, the CP was moved up immediately in rear of the line of departure. Nothing further could be done at this time but wait for the attack to begin.

A flight of planes came over, but conditions were such that they were unable to drop their bombs on the enemy position, and as had been feared, this phase of the fire plan could not be accomplished.

Promptly at H-20 the artillery opened fire. The 3d Armored Division Artillery reinforced by the artillery of 29th Division fired on the enemy positions forward of the Line of Departure. Infantry rifles, machine guns, and heavy weapons joined the fire creating a din which called to mind the Ft. Benning Infantry School Battalion firing

(11) Personal knowledge.

problem. Emphasis had been placed on participation by all weapons, but it was surprising to see a soldier emptying his pistol into the air.

Commanders had numbered the fields on their aerial photographs and enlarged maps so that each little battle group knew which hedgerow to attack. The forces of Lt. Col. Whitlaw on the left and Lt. Col. Cockefair on the right crossed the Line of Departure on time, employing the tactics which had been rehearsed in the rear area. This method is shown on the schematic diagram, Chart A, and was as follows: The frontage was divided so that a platoon of Infantry and platoon of tanks with an engineer team and a section of tank destroyers directed their attack at the hedgerow immediately ahead. The tank platoon was employed with the two sections moving along the hedgerows which paralleled the advance, one section along the left hedgerow and the other along the right. A squad of Infantry was teamed with each tank section to protect it from the German bazooka teams, and to hold the ground gained. The infantry light machine gun squad and 60 mm mortar squad advanced with the team and added their fire to support the attack. Tanks fired their machine guns and cannon at the hedgerows and the infantry advanced to take the position.

Tank-infantry teams attacked alternate fields, thus leaving a field between each team. On taking their assigned fields and hedgerows, the teams then cleared the hedgerow between them.

When the hedgerows had been cleared of the enemy, the

dozer tank went forward and breached a passage so that the operation could be repeated. (12)

Immediately on launching the attack, both the Whitlaw and Cockefair forces were subjected to heavy enemy small arms and mortar fire. The enemy had advanced close to our front lines to get out of the preparation fires and was ready to meet the attack. After a short delay and an artillery concentration on the enemy position, Whitlaw succeeded in moving forward. Difficulty in communication of infantrymen and tanks was experienced in this attack as was the case throughout the day in both the Whitlaw and Cockefair forces. Some tankers kept their turrets open and there were instances of commanders of tank units fighting on foot with the infantry. There were other cases of infantrymen having to climb aboard tanks to knock on the turrets to communicate with the crews. Tracer ammunition proved valuable in designating targets to the tanks. Whitlaw's advance was slow but steady. After two hours his force was halted by enemy machine gun and mortar fire just north of Segueville. It soon became evident that the enemy position was much stronger than those previously encountered. Again the artillery was called on and after having fired a concentration, advance was attempted. Apparently the follow up was too slow, for the enemy hurled back the assault. After another concentration by the artillery, the attack progressed satisfactorily and another hedgerow was taken. After this position was taken, the advance was steady once more until the creek

(12) Personal knowledge; C-141 - Schematic Diagram.

which flows north of Villiers Fossard was reached at 1300. During this advance two of the tank-dozer were lost due to mechanical failures. The advance of Whitlaw was ordered to halt at the creek as the Cockefair force had not fared as well. (13) (Map C)

The heavy enemy fire which greeted the Cockefair Force as it crossed the Line of Departure was maintained by the enemy. (14) Each attempt to advance was met by machine gun and mortar fire which stopped the Infantrymen and the tanks could not advance alone as four 88mm guns were firing in the area.

As an illustration of the effectiveness of the German mortar fire, the following entry in the S-3 Journal is given: "Serial No 23, Time 1104, From 2nd Bn., 36th Inf, E Company 36th reports lost all but one man of mortar squad." There were other instances of casualties to several men at one time. Commanders had to be alert to keep the men dispersed. Especially was this true when the advance was halted.

By 1200 the artillery fire which had been supporting the infantry in its attacks showed its cumulative effect and the right platoon succeeded in making its greatest gain, a depth of four hedgerows approximately 250 yards. However, this position could not be held and by 1230 the Cockefair Force was still just beyond the line of departure with the entire force committed.

Col. Parks, TFY Commander, had soon realized that the

(13) A-9, A-7; (14) Personal knowledge.

Cockefair Force would have the greater trouble, so he went there to be at the point where he thought he could do the most good. Likewise, General Hickey came to TFY since TFX had not met strong resistance. TFX advance had been steady from the time of the initial attack and by 1130 it had reached a line La Forge-Bois de Bretel, where it was ordered to remain.

General Watson, 3d Armored Division Commander, also came to TFY CP as did General "Dutch" Cota, Assistant Division Commander of 29th Infantry Division.

Keeping these officers and the liaison officers from CCA and 115th Infantry informed, together with taking innumerable messages on the radio, made the S-3 a very busy person. It will be recalled that S-1, S-2, and S-4 had been left at the rear CP. As a result, messages of all types - casualty reports, requests for ammunition, situation reports, reports of vehicle casualties, enemy information, and orders - had to be received and transmitted over the command channel. (14)

Cockefair continued to press the enemy and planned a coordinated attack to commence at 1450.

General Hickey moved an assault group consisting of a company of tanks, company of infantry, and squad of engineers from TFZ to act as reserve for Cockefair.

When the artillery lifted, the tank infantry teams pushed forward and this time they were not to be denied. The steady advance was continued all the way to the creek

(14) Personal knowledge.

S-2 only
mentioned
before

north of Villiers Fossard. A heavy artillery concentration was placed on Villiers Fossard and the higher ground to the south and west. By 1755, Cockefair had troops across the stream west of the town and continued the advance.

Since the Cockefair force was unsuccessful in keeping abreast of Whitlaw, a platoon of tanks and platoon of infantry from Task Force Y's reserve were committed to follow the advance of Whitlaw and protect his exposed flank. The remainder of the reserve followed Cockefair. When Cockefair reached the stream north of Villiers Fossard, Whitlaw was ordered to continue the attack. Whitlaw crossed the stream, but in so doing, two tank dozers became stuck. No replacements were available so for the remainder of the day the engineer team was used to blow passages in the hedgerows with explosives. (15)

After he had taken several hedgerows beyond Villiers Fossard, Cockefair sent troops into the town to clean it out. By 1930 little resistance was met as the enemy realized the position had been outflanked and was untenable. The enemy placed artillery and mortar fire on the town, causing casualties among the infantrymen.

At 1953, General Hickey ordered Task Force Y to continue the attack until 2130, make contact with TFX on the left, and dig in for the night. TFX had been ordered to call off its attack which had been planned for 1900 since the line held would tie in with TFY.

General Hickey ordered TFX and TFY to resume the at-

(15) A-9.

tack at 300800 June.

Although the Commanders received the order to halt the advance at 2130, it was over an hour after that time when the assault groups were able to report positions for the night. It was difficult to break off the attack until it became dark, which at that time of the year in France is between 2230 and 2300. (16)

For all around defense during the night, the tanks were pulled back and infantry held the outer perimeter.

Outposts were established and preparations were made for continuing the attack at 0800 the next morning.

TFY CP moved a short distance down the hill and away from the road to get better protection from enemy mortar fire, which seemed to be directed at the road junction, near which the CP was located.

A CONFUSED SITUATION

Several complaints from Whitlaw during the latter part of the day that the unit on his right was firing into his troops made me suspect that his troops were farther to the west than he believed. When the Liaison officer from Col. Whitlaw's CP came in at 2230, he reported the Whitlaw Force at the final objective, but stated that his report would be verified. After studying the map he agreed with me that the position reported might be erroneous and returned to the assault group CP. (17)

In a short time, Major Richard Bradley, Whitlaw's

(16) A-9; (17) A-9.

S-3, came into the CP. When we had discussed the possibilities of error of location, he studied the map at length. Finally, he was convinced that the position reported was erroneous and instead of being at the reported location, the force was approximately 600 yards to the northwest. The terrain features of the two locations were almost identical. Apparently, the force had been sideslipping to the west ever since it crossed the stream which runs north of Villiers Fossard. It will be recalled that the two remaining tank dozers had been lost in this crossing and the force had had to depend on the engineers to blow holes in the hedgerows for the remainder of the day. This had resulted in attacks on the fields with the smallest hedgerows and the more open terrain. The outcome of these attacks was a slight change of direction to the southwest which placed the force in the left front of the zone of Cockefair. This also resulted in a wide gap between the left flank of TFY and the right flank of TFX. (18)

Something had to be done to correct the situation before the attack was launched at 0800. In the present locations, an attack would result in Cockefair's firing into Whitlaw and the right flank of TFX would be exposed when it made its attack. It would be very difficult to use TFY reserve as it had followed Cockefair. Col. Parks, who was getting a short rest, was awakened and informed of the situation.

(18) Personal knowledge.

THE SOLUTION

We went immediately to CCA CP and informed General Hickey of the predicament. He got the picture clearly in his mind, took a puff on his pipe, and very deliberately studied his map. It did not take him long to make his estimate of the situation. He sent for Lt. Col. Walter Abney, CO of TFZ and then informed us of his plan. TFZ would send an assault group, Company of tanks and company of infantry, to attack in the left of the zone from which the Whitlaw force had sideslipped. This force would make contact with TFX on the left and continue the attack. Whitlaw would hold his present position until Cockefair came abreast of his right and then both forces would push on. Cockefair would attack at 0800 as planned but would direct his attack more to the west in order to avoid firing into Whitlaw. (19)

Commanders were informed of the situation and change of plan of attack. At 300800 June the attack began and Cockefair advanced steadily until he came abreast Whitlaw. The Assault Group from TFZ experienced no difficulty in its advance to make contact with TFX.

The enemy had established another defensive position in the vicinity of Bourg de Enfer, utilizing the stream north of the settlement as a barrier. It was not as hard to reduce as Villiers Fossard. At 1500 shortly after Cockefair reported a successful crossing of the stream, orders were received to halt the advance and defend the

(19) Personal knowledge.

ground gained. (20)

TFX had been successful in pushing out from the initial positions, but the positions taken were so exposed that the line was eventually established along the road LaForge-Bois de Bretel. The selection of this position for defense was influenced by the fact that enemy armor, estimated five to ten tanks or SP 88 mm guns, were observed in front of TFX. Difficulty in keeping direction in hedgerows resulted in General Hickey's having to commit another assault group from TFZ in the zone of TFX to fill a gap which was created.

The 29th Infantry Division had received orders from XIX Corps to be prepared for the relief of CCA when the objective was taken. Shortly after 1500 the 29th Division began movement forward to take over the positions. The 115th Regiment had kept a liaison officer at TFY CP all day and as a result, the commanders had been kept informed of the situation. Necessary coordination was effected and the relief was made without incident.

Had the Germans been stronger and able to launch a counterattack while the relief was taking place, it might have been successful as the relief was rather haphazard with minimum control.

All units of TFY came out of the line before dark and moved back to the assembly position at St. Clair sur l'Elle.

(21)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

TFY was successful in its mission as a part of CCA

(20) A-5, (21) A-7.

in reducing the Villiers Fossard Salient.

The enemy salient was hit straight from the front. Due to the nature of the terrain and ground held by the enemy, the attack had to depend on power to be successful. There was very little opportunity for maneuver at any level.

Attacking through the hedgerows and remaining off the roads seemed to be the best method of attack. Artillery fires on suspected or likely gun positions, followed by a quick dash by tanks down the roads may have gained ground and the objective more quickly with fewer casualties. This method was used in subsequent attacks successfully west of the Vire River, but the situation there was more fluid than at Villiers Fossard where the enemy had had ample time to prepare his defenses.

In spite of having trained together, the infantry and tanks did not have the degree of cooperation and coordination desired. Communication remained the big problem although every available means was used.

The Infantry-Tank-Artillery team proved to be the solution for a successful attack in this difficult terrain.

The decision to commit a Combat Command of one of the two remaining "heavy" Armored Divisions in a limited objective attack in hedgerow terrain appears to one at regimental level to be a questionable decision. The results obtained were a straightening of the line of the 29th Infantry Division a gain of approximately one mile and the gaining of combat experience for the commanders and men of Combat Command A, 3d Armored Division. The price in vehicle and per-

sonnel casualties was relatively high for the ground gained. If the attack had not been successful and greater casualties had resulted, it is possible that the successes accomplished by the division in later actions may have been jeopardized. However, it is realized that the higher commanders had to use the means at hand, in the words of General Montgomery, to "Tidy up the battlefield" in preparation for the greater things to come.

From the standpoint of preparation for the attack, a degree of thoroughness was attained which time and conditions seldom permit. Some difficulties would have been obviated had TFY provided for a larger Command Group. Although the action was not taken lightly, preparation was made more to take care of the obvious rather than the worst that might happen. Fortunately, the proximity of the rear CP assisted in prompt remedial action for the few oversights.

In the conduct of the attack, Commanders and men displayed courage and grim determination which could only result in success.

Loss of contact by units is not to be condoned, but it is understandable in the type terrain over which the action took place. More frequent, accurate reports of position would have disclosed that the Whitlaw Force was side slipping into the Cockfair Zone. The situation as it existed on the morning of 30 June could have been avoided.

The quick decision of General Hickey to commit a Battle Group from his reserve in the zone from which the

Whitlaw Force had side-slipped was a sound decision and the execution of the plan rectified the situation.

In attempting to assure that the men would fire their weapons, overemphasis resulted in too much unaimed fire and needless expenditure of ammunition.

In the early stages of the attack, the artillery was forced to fire additional preparations after having delivered what the Division Artillery Officer deemed sufficient concentrations for advances to be made. This was due to the fact that the Infantrymen were waiting too long to get to the enemy positions, thus giving the enemy an opportunity to man his weapons. No doubt this additional artillery aided in softening the enemy line and was not entirely wasted.

The use of tank-dozers in hedgerow terrain was of inestimable value. They proved to be far superior to the use of explosives in opening gaps in the hedgerows.

The relief of TFY by the 29th Infantry Division was effected with little confusion during daylight hours. However, a counterattack by the Germans, if they had been capable of such might, have regained the ground lost as there was a lack of coordination above company level. (22)

The 3d Armored Division "first bloodied its nose" in the action of CCA at Villiers Fossard. A perusal of the following casualty figures will reveal that the action was intense. The figures are taken as printed in A-4 for 29 June 1944.

(22) Statement of a Bn. Comdr.

	<u>Killed In Action</u>	<u>Missing In Action</u>	<u>Wounded In Action</u>	<u>Total</u>
2d Bn, 32d Armd Regt	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>18</u>
2d Bn, 36th Armd Inf Regt.	16	2	69	87
Co. A, 23rd Armd Engr Bn.	3	0	2	5
67th Armd FA Bn	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
	25	2	86	113

"Significantly, 70% of Task Force Y's casualties on 29 June were from shell fragments and only 19% were from small arms fire."

"Other casualty figures are further proof of the efficiency of the German mortars. In the whole of the 3d Armored Division, the approximate breakdown was:

	<u>Gun Shot Wounds</u>	<u>Shell Fragments</u>	<u>Grenades & Burns</u>	<u>Total</u>
June 29	29	121	0	150
June 30	9	200	12	221
July 1	<u>0</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>30</u>
	38	351	12	401 (23)

Vehicle losses of CCA were as follows: Figures are not available to show how the losses were sustained in the Tank Forces.

Tanks	31	
Other Vehicles	12	(24)

It is impossible to compare the casualty record of TFY with that of the enemy since the enemy meticulously evac-

(23) A-4, p. 4; (24) A-1, p. 196.

uated his dead and wounded. However, it is probable that his casualties were also heavy. The fires which were placed on his positions were sure to have had their effect before he withdrew.

G-2 XIX Corps made a study of the action and the enemy positions after the engagement and published the following conclusions:

"With over two weeks to organize the position, the Germans dug in only one hedgerow in front of the Villiers Fossard Crest. This hedgerow had nothing in it that could not have been dug by a field entrenching shovel."

"The hedgerow selected as the German MLR had three characteristics:

a. It was under direct observation from the German OP's and gun positions along the Villiers Fossard crest.

b. It was within infantry weapon support range of the Villiers Fossard crest.

c. It was on the south side of the hill immediately north of Villiers Fossard; i.e., on the negative slope with sight defilade from the north.

d. It had covered lanes of retreat to the Villiers Fossard position."

"Both flanks of the selected hedgerow were protected by LMG's sited with at least 180 arcs of fire; along the hedgerow LMG's had mainly frontal fire only and restricted (normally 30 degrees) arcs of fire; except as the flanks. LMG's were not positioned in the corners."

"Obvious German construction work (as in the orchard east of Villiers Fossard) visible on an aerial photo was probably dummy; all actually occupied positions were so well concealed as to be virtually invisible except from the rear, or possibly from occupation tracks and foot paths."

"The German counter-reconnaissance screen had been so effective that accurate information on the actual organization of the position was not available; no air photos had been taken (due to bad weather) since the position was organized by the Germans."

"German observers were found in trees. Telephone wires were laid from hedgerow to hedgerow. A slow deliberate advance plays right into the Germans' hands as their communications and prearranged fires let them follow with fire any slow-moving attacker."

"The German field fortifications are simple, shallow, and provide excellent protection against our artillery or small arms fire. While so protected, however, the defenders cannot man their firing niches. Mortar fire and time shell on a hedgerow will drive them into their covered slit trenches and out of their firing positions. Our advance can be made while the hedgerow is under such fire, but not immediately after the fire lifts except with heavy casualties."

"Anti-tank mines, teller, magnetic and wooden, were found in the position; some were laid in the streets of Villiers-Fossard; none were found in fields or along hedge-

rows. Bazookas, anti-tank hand launchers (Faustpatromen) and AT rifle grenades were scattered in small numbers over the area."

"As in other engagements recently in this sector, the German artillery was not in great evidence. Virtually all casualties from shell fragments are believed to have been caused from mortars." (25)

LESSONS

1. In the attack, aggressiveness is of prime importance. ⁴To become stationary along a hedgerow or other natural landmark is to invite disaster. ⁵In an initial engagement, green troops must not be allowed to forget basic training lessons of aggressiveness and dispersion.

2. In order to get the benefit from artillery fire, it must be followed up immediately while the enemy is still in his holes. To delay is to allow the enemy to man his weapons and meet the attack.

3. For control of a force as large as rFY, a battalion of infantry, a battalion of tanks, a company of tank destroyers, a company of engineers, a supporting artillery battalion, and medical and maintenance personnel, the command group must be large enough to meet the needs of the command.

4. In close terrain, especially, physical contact of attacking units with units on their flanks is essential. Frequent, accurate reports must be furnished to higher headquarters for proper coordination to be accomplished.

(25) A-4, p. 4-5.

5. Careful planning for an attack will pay dividends.
It will save much time and effort which will be needed for problems which will arise as the execution of the plan is carried out.

6. It is not possible to frighten a determined enemy from his prepared positions by volume of fire. The fire must be effective and to be so must be close in, preferably on his flanks or rear.

7. First hand knowledge was gained concerning the effectiveness of the German mortars. Henceforth, it was considered the enemy's most effective weapon.

8. It takes the first action with the enemy to give the necessary polish to well trained troops.